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Contact: Lisa Marie Burcar
916-384-9026 (w)
916-212-8108 (c)

High-Speed Rail Authority Board Certifies Merced to Fresno Final EIR/EIS

FRESNO, Calif. – The California High-Speed Rail Authority (CHSRA) Board today certified the Final Environmental Impact Report/Environmental Impact Statement (Final EIR/EIS) for the Merced to Fresno section of the High-Speed Train project allowing the Authority to take additional steps toward starting construction in late 2012 or early 2013. The Authority also chose a north-south route and station locations for Merced and Fresno.

“Today we reached a major milestone toward making High-Speed Rail a reality,” said Board Chair Dan Richard. “These documents and decisions represent our response to hundreds of comments sent to us from residents, elected officials and business owners as well as feedback shared in nearly 150 public meetings,” Richard said.

The Merced to Fresno high-speed train section is approximately 65 miles long and will follow a route known as the “Hybrid” alternative. This alignment was identified as the preferred alternative out of three primary alternatives studied in 2011. The “Hybrid” alternative generally parallels the Union Pacific railroad tracks and State Route 99 between Merced and Fresno and is responsive to community and civic feedback. To avoid impacts to downtown Madera, the alignment travels east of Madera and generally parallels the existing Burlington Northern Santa Fe (BNSF) railroad corridor. The board also selected the Downtown Merced Station location, and the Downtown Fresno Station at the Mariposa Street location as part of the statewide High-Speed Train system.

On Wednesday, the Board heard a staff presentation and took public comments on the Merced to Fresno Final EIR/EIS. After deliberations, the Board convened today to consider whether to certify the documents under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) and, complete the CEQA process. The Board directed that the Authority carry forward all options for the Wye near Chowchilla for further study under CEQA and to report back to the Board by July 31. The Board then voted unanimously to certify the Merced to Fresno Section Final EIR/EIS.

In the next step, the Federal Railroad Administration will consider approving the project and issuing a Record of Decision under the National Environmental Policy Act, scheduled for June 2012.

The Final EIR/EIS is available on the High-Speed Rail website, <http://cahighspeedrail.ca.gov>, along with supporting documents.